

## Historical notes of Grey Cloud Island and its vicinity /

### **HISTORICAL NOTES OF GREY CLOUD ISLAND AND ITS VICINITY.\***

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Grey Cloud island, about five miles long and one to two miles wide, is situated in the south end of Washington county, Minnesota, between St. Paul and Hastings. It is bounded on the west end and south side by the Mississippi river, and on the north side and east end by the Grey Cloud creek or slough.

The name Grey Cloud in the Dakota or Sioux language is Mar-pi-ya-ro-to, with the addition of one more syllable, win, meaning woman. It was the Sioux name of both the wife and the daughter of James Aird, an Indian trader. The wife, first bearing this name, was a sister of the Sioux Chief Wabasha who took part in the war between the United States and England in 1812, and her father's name also was Wabasha. She was born at her father's village, where the city of Winona now stands, and died in 1844 at Black Dog's village, sometimes called Grey Iron's village, about six miles southwest of Mendota, on the Minnesota river in what is now Eagan township, Dakota county. She was buried in one of the Indian burial grounds near their village. Her marriage to Aird was in 1783 or soon afterward, and they had one child, a girl named Margaret.

James Aird was a Scotchman, born in Ayrshire, and is said to have been a cousin of Robert Burns, the poet. He came to America about 1783, landing at Quebec, and probably in that year came to Wabasha's village as a trader in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company. He afterward went to Prairie du Chien for the same company, where Joseph Rolette, Sr., was at the head of the company's trading post. Aird died at Prairie du Chien in the fall of 1819 or 1820. Hazen Mooers, the well known trader among the Sioux, who

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came to what is now Minnesota in 1819, and Aird's granddaughter, Jane Anderson, were present when he died. A part of this information was obtained from this Jane Anderson, afterward Mrs. Andrew Robertson, who died at the Sisseton Agency in South Dakota, or at Brown's Valley, Minn., in the fall of 1905.

Margaret Aird was married to Captain Thomas Anderson about 1805 at Prairie du Chien. He was an officer in the British army, and took part in the capture of Fort McKay at that place in the war of 1812. He was born at Cornwall, Canada, in January, 1778, and died at Port Hope, Canada, in 1874. They had three children, Mary, Angus M. (an early Indian trader in Minnesota), and Jane, who married Andrew Robertson, head farmer for the government at the Yellow Medicine Agency, and afterward superintendent of Indian schools on the reservation, from about 1854 to 1858.

In the Dakota language Margaret Aird was named Mar-pi-ya-ro-to-win, the same as her mother. She separated from Captain Anderson after they had been married about eight years, and later married Hazen Mooers, who was the first agent or trader for the American Fur Company at Lake Traverse, Minnesota, building the trading post at that place. Margaret was with him there, and also at the next post where he was stationed, called Little Rock, in the west part of the present Nicollet county, on the Minnesota river. Mooers and his family removed in 1838 from Little Rock to what is now called Grey Cloud island. They were accompanied by Andrew Robertson and family, and also by Joseph R. Brown, who was well known to nearly all the pioneers and traders of those early times. They all came there together on the same day.

Mooers and Robertson took possession of three large bark lodges on the west end of the island, which had been vacated in the preceding autumn by Medicine Bottle's band of Sioux, when they moved across the river to their new village at Pine Bend, in Dakota county. Brown built a log house farther east or down the river. It was while living on this island, from 1838 to 1847, that Andrew Robertson named it Grey Cloud island, after his mother-in-law, Margaret Aird Mooers, whose 373 name, in its English translation, like that

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of her mother, was Grey Cloud. Margaret died at Black Dog's village in 1850, and was buried there.

The band of which Medicine Bottle was chief had its origin through the dissatisfaction of some members of the band of Big Thunder and of Little Crow, father of the chief of that name who led the Sioux massacre in 1862. Previous to the treaty of 1837, their village was on the east bank of the Mississippi river about two miles below the present city of St. Paul. After this treaty, by which the Sioux ceded their lands east of the Mississippi, they removed the village to the west bank of the river, where it was known to the early settlers as Kaposia, on the site of South Park, near the South St. Paul stock yards. A few families of that band left the old village on the east side and chose as their leader a noted counselor and medicine man named Waukan-ojan-jan, meaning Spirit Light or Holy Light, as translated into English by his daughter, but called Medicine Bottle by the early fur traders and pioneers.

They went down the river about eight miles and built some large bark and willow lodges on the northwest end of Grey Cloud island, where they lived and had their fields and gardens until the autumn of 1837. Two of their vacated lodges were occupied the next year, as before noted, by Mooers and Robertson with their families, and the third one was used by them as a storehouse. In May, 1839, these men built two log houses, with stone chimneys, near the river, and they farmed a part of the gardens and cornfields formerly cultivated by the Indians. That year they raised potatoes, corn, and garden truck, some of which they sold at Fort Snelling for the use of the officers and troops; and in 1840 they raised some grain on these fields and sold a part of it at the fort. These notes of early farming on Grey Cloud island were told to me by Mrs. Mary Brown, a daughter of Hazen Mooers, wife of John W. Brown, who was a half brother of the distinguished Joseph R. Brown. Their marriage was on this island, on New Year's day in 1846.

In the fall of 1837 or the spring of 1838, Medicine Bottle and his band moved across the Mississippi to the west bank a short distance farther south, at the place called by the early

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French and Canadian voyageurs Pin de Tour, now known as 374 Pine Bend. The meaning of both these names is "The bend in the river where the pine trees are." Some of these white pines are still standing there on the side of the bluff, being conspicuously seen from the decks of passing steamboats. A large village of bark and willow houses or lodges was built at this place, and sometimes beside the permanent lodges there were many tepees of poles and skins during the spring and fall hunting seasons.

The situation of this village was a fine one for the Indians. The marshes and heavy timber on the bottomlands around Spring lake and Belanger island, east of them, in what is now Nininger township, were full of small game, such as geese, ducks, muskrats and mink; and on the high land were found the prairie chicken, foxes, partridges and quail, and pigeons by the thousands that sometimes nested and roosted in the heavy timber on Belanger island. The timber consisted of soft maple, cottonwood, elm, hackberry, and ash, most of which was still standing in 1856 when I came to Nininger. The wild pigeons had their roosts and nests on this island in 1859. The last that I saw of their great flocks, which were sometimes one to two miles long, transverse to their course of flight, but usually not more than fifty feet wide, was in the spring and summer of 1871. Flock after flock followed each other, at short intervals, sometimes for several days.

Spring lake, southeast of this village a short distance, was alive with large fish, among which were catfish, buffalo, pike, and pickerel, also sunfish and other small kinds. In the winter of 1856–57 our people went up to the primitive sawmill near the junction of Spring lake and Belanger sloughs, shut down the gates to the flume, and threw out so many of these large fish as to fill half a wagon box.

The land on which this Sioux village stood, together with their gardens and cornfields, was afterward pre-empted by William A. Bissell, the first white settler at Pine Bend, in the present Inver Grove township, Dakota county. The village was near the river under the bluffs, on government lot 10, section 35; and the gardens and cornfield were on the hill,

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on the south half of the southeast quarter and on the southeast quarter of the southwest quarter of section 34, Inver Grove.

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Bissell first visited Medicine Bottle's village in 1849 or 1850; and in 1851 Medicine Bottle allowed him to put up a small log shack under and near the bluff, perhaps a quarter or half a mile north or northwest of their village. He moved his family down from Red Rock with a span of horses and sled, on the ice late in the fall of 1851, and occupied this shack. The family had been living with some of the early settlers and missionaries at Red Rock, among whom were John A. Ford, Mr. Irish, Mr. Holton, and others. In 1852 Bissell built a hewed log house, covering it with shingles split mostly from oak logs; and the same year he raised some potatoes, corn, and garden stuff. He paid for this land August 6, 1855, and his receipt was signed by the government receiver, R. P. Russell, of Minneapolis.

The old Indian trail from Wabasha's village, on the site of Winona, to Little Crow's village, at Kaposia, or a branch of this trail, ran into Medicine Bottle's village and out again through what was afterward known as Bissell's coulie. Also a branch from this trail went to Fort Snelling. Captain John Tapper, the first ferryman at Minneapolis, who died in 1909, told me that he came over this trail in the fall of 1844 from Lake Pepin to Mendota. He said that it was nearly dark when he and his companions arrived at Medicine Bottle's village, and they stayed there all night. The chief entertained them as well as circumstances would permit, and the next morning they followed the trail to Mendota and were ferried across the Minnesota river to Fort Snelling.

In 1853 William Strathern of Rich Valley, Dakota county, and William Senescall, took claims within a mile or two of Bissell. These two men in the spring of that year ploughed a part of the Indian cornfield for Bissell, and he put it into wheat. This wheat was cut with a cradle and threshed with a flail by Walter Strathern, a brother of William, later in the fall or winter. Walter is now living on his original pre-emption claim taken in 1853 at Rich Valley. A part of this wheat was hauled by William Strathern around by the way of St. Paul and

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Cottage Grove to the grist mill of Lemuel Bolles in Afton, where it was made into flour. William Senescall was 376 living at Stewart or Glencoe, Minn., a few years ago; he was a member of Company F, Hatch's Battalion.

Medicine Bottle and his band lived at Pine Bend fifteen years, leaving there for the new Sioux Reservation on the upper Minnesota river in the fall of 1852. Both the chief and his wife were true friends and neighbors of the Bissell family, and just before they left for their new home they came to the Bissell home to bid them good-bye. They had their faces painted and ran out of the house, threw themselves on the ground, and carried on their lamentations after the Indian fashion of expressing sorrow at the loss of friends or relatives. They felt very badly on account of having to leave the Bissells and their old home and hunting grounds. Mr. Bissell died at Sauk Center in December, 1871, and was buried there.

The third and last village of Medicine Bottle and his band in Minnesota was one mile west of the government buildings at the Redwood or Lower Sioux Agency. He was accidentally killed near his lodge or house in this village before the outbreak of 1862. Outside of his house he had a scaffold erected for drying corn, and hanging from the rafters was an iron chain with a sharp hook on the lower end. Some of his family were cleaning or cutting up a wild duck, and he was feeding his chickens, when one of them ran off with a piece of the duck. The chief ran to catch it but stumbled, and in falling the sharp hook caught him in the mouth, penetrating his brain. He expired in a few minutes from hemorrhage. He was attended by Dr. Asa W. Daniels, the government physician at the Redwood Agency, now living in Pomona, California, who has supplied this account of his death. Dr. Daniels further writes:

We looked upon Medicine Bottle as a civilized Indian. He lived in a frame house, cultivated a plot of ground, did not believe in conjuration nor practice it, but possessed considerable knowledge in bleeding, cupping, and the hot steam bath, and kept medicinal barks, roots, and herbs, which he used in cases of sickness. He was an Indian of much ability, honest,

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truthful, and bore the duties of life faithfully, and always gave good advice and worthy example to the others of his people.

Another Sioux whose name in English was Medicine Bottle, also called Grizzly Bear, a nephew of this chief and son of Grey 377 Iron, took part in the massacre, for which he and the young chief Shakopee, called Little Six, having been captured in 1864, were tried by a military commission at Fort Snelling and were hung there November 11, 1865.

The site of the city of Hastings was earlier called Oliver's Grove, after Lieut. William G. Oliver, who was ascending the Mississippi with one or more keel boats late in the autumn of 1819, but was prevented from going farther by a gorge of ice in the bend of the river opposite to this city. The boat or boats were probably run up to the outlet of Lake Rebecca, to be out of the way of the ice when the river broke up in the spring of 1820. Lieutenant Oliver was on his way from Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien with supplies for the soldiers at St. Peter's camp, now Fort Snelling, among whom was the first settler of Hastings, Joe Brown, the drummer boy, then about fourteen years of age.

Oliver passed the winter here with some soldiers guarding these supplies. I imagine that he put up a log camp on the bottomland near where his boats were tied, as it was covered with very large elm and maple trees, which with the smaller growth of willows and maples along the riverside would protect the camp from the northwest wind and also furnish plenty of fuel.

When I first saw the bottomlands on the long island adjoining Lake Rebecca, between Nininger and Hastings, they were covered with heavy timber, soft maple, white and black ash, elm, cottonwood, and hackberry; and on the lower end of the island, next to the river for half a mile, was a dense grove of willows and small maples so close together in some places that one could not get through them. I was quite familiar with these woods and also Oliver's Grove when I was young, because my father's stock at Nininger was pastured

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on these bottoms and I had to drive the cows home at night during the summer months, sometimes finding them as far down the river as Oliver's Grove.

After leaving the army, Joseph R. Brown commenced to trade with the Indians about the year 1826. He had a trading post in 1832 at St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin, which he left 378 in a boat or canoe on one of the last days of July in that year, coming down the St. Croix to its mouth and thence up the Mississippi to Oliver's Grove. Here he built a one-story log house on what was afterward platted as Lot 1, Block 12, of the original townsite of Hastings, at the southwest corner of Second and Vermillion streets. This house stood in a beautiful grove of white and bur oaks. An extensive belt of oak woods, including white, bur, black, and red oaks, continued thence three miles northwest along the bank of Lake Rebecca and on the second plateau above the river, to the home of my father, James R. Case, in section 18, Nininger. The grove in Hastings extended south as far as to the site of Hon. Albert Schaller's home, on Fifth street, where some of its large trees yet remain.